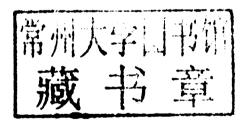# Pervasive Prevention

A Feminist Reading of the Rise of the Security Society

Tamar Pitch

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Foreword

It is a pleasure to introduce this insightful book by Tamar Pitch, a leading Italian writer on crime, law and feminism. Her latest volume offers a wide-ranging account of the centrality of prevention and offers a new way of looking at current changes in the configurations of western societies' obsession with the search for security and its often self-defeating results. She offers important and often caustic reminders of the futility of trying to treat dangers from others and the difficulties of building a just society as if this could be reduced to taking precautions against the risks of disease.

Pitch, writes, as she says, as one influenced by Italy, but what she has to tell us is not about Italy as such, even if her location outside the Anglo-American mainstream world of criminology sharpens her awareness of wider developments (the same goes for the works by Antonio Roversi and Alessandro De Giorgi already published in this series). Tamar Pitch is in fact an accomplished social theorist, and offers interesting commentary and adaptation of ideas taken from Beck, Bauman and others. But it is, above all, her feminist starting point that enables her to have a special perspective on what is happening. On the one hand the city is a place of opportunity for men, but of danger for women. Yet she sees the stress on prevention and self-control as a way to avoid risk as very much what women have always had to do – so in a sense the middle classes especially are engaged in a feminization of social control. She also stresses the role of women as victims (and the political costs of this limiting of their role) and the way they are used as an excuse in certain security campaigns. She relates her ideas to the latest thinking by David Garland, Jonathan Simon and Nikolas Rose – and behind them all sees Foucault's failure to theorize the implications of changes in social control for women and from a women's point of view. Her arguments are subtle and her ideas are not uncontroversial. She argues for example that new methods of seeking security seek liberation from bodies and ignore the awareness of 'the body' that women have, even though it could be objected that we live in a society that is obsessed with bodies. In any case, this and her other theses merit the wider debate which this translation into English will hopefully help them to achieve.

David Nelken
Series Editor

Preface

Perhaps the title of this small work is a bit pretentious. The issue of prevention, or rather the way in which the imperative of prevention has become so powerful and widespread today at all levels, merits a more profound discussion than I have presented here. I can only say that I could not resist the temptation to add my own definition of the contemporary social scenario in the so-called West to the many definitions already on the market. Furthermore, it is a definition which seems to me to be quite a comprehensive synthesis of the others.

This is my own reflection on questions that I confronted while working on the theme of urban safety, and, more generally, on social control today. This was certainly not the first time that I ran into 'prevention' in my studies of crime, its control, and related issues. In a certain sense, every study about deviance and social control sets out and proposes to figure out the causes of what has been variously labeled disorder, social disorganization, deviance, crime, and so on. And, in one way or another, this research into the underlying causes serves to or is used to try to prevent all these phenomena. For some years, however, and at least for about the last 20 years in Europe, certainly in Italy, the emphasis of studies and policies has shifted decisively from the problem of the 'producers' of disorder, disorganization, and crime, to studies of the victims, and especially the potential victims: in other words, all of us. And the meaning of prevention has also changed: prevention is for the most part intended today as every strategy and means to reduce the risk of victimization for all of us, while researches into the causes of 'social problems' have become outdated.

Risk, security – by now we are familiar with these themes as presented in political and scientific debate; but less so with prevention. Yet prevention is really what ties them together. It links them not only with regard to disorder and deviance, naturally, but to many other questions and problems as well. This work addresses how prevention intervenes in our daily lives, how this imperative has changed and in turn what changes it produces, as well as how the social scenario that was at the basis of research for social causes has also changed.

It will be clear that I made ample use of studies by many contemporary authors, trying to connect their various contributions, which I believe converge precisely on the topic of prevention. This, in addition to my attempt at a gendered reading of the question, constitutes perhaps the only originality this work purports to have.

Grateful acknowledgements are generally noted at this point. I believe that participating in the group of women we called *Balena* (which includes Maria Luisa Boccia, Gabriella Bonacchi, Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, Laura Gallucci, Marina Graziosi, Paola Masi, Bianca Pomeranzi and Rosetta Stella), and the passionate discussions that took place amongst us, beginning with the question of war, were fundamental for igniting the spark for many of the themes studied here. Later, I collaborated on the production of an issue of *DWF* (*DonnaWomenFemme*) on prevention with some of the women from this group, which not only spurred me to continue the research, but also provided me with essential guidance. I am also indebted to all of my friends from *Balena* for making a passionate and rich intellectual exchange possible – which is something precious and even essential in these times.

Maria Luisa Boccia and Ota De Leonardis read one section of this book, and I tried, as best I could, to follow some of their suggestions. I am aware of the fact that I did not reach the level of their expectations.

I am really grateful to Liza Tripp for her translation this book, certainly no easy job.

Janet MacMillan was more than an editor, and I wish to thank her for her precious advice and the great help she had given me to make this book more readable.

I dedicate this book to my son David, hoping that in the future I may dedicate to him a better one. Our life together often includes conflict, but it is always stimulating, and it is the context of my life, and therefore also that of my work.

Tamar Pitch

Contents

Introduction

I am a smoker, so I always feel guilty. But I don't want to (or perhaps I cannot) quit. So it was with pleasure, anxiety, and impatience that I heard the news that a hospital in Milan was equipped with a new machine capable of making a very precise early diagnosis of a variety of different tumours, including lung tumours. When this becomes available in Rome too, I'm sure I will make use of it immediately.

Moreover, I subject myself to an annual mammogram, Pap smear and periodic blood tests – despite two or three bad experiences when computer malfunctions falsely diagnosed me with illnesses I didn't have. I hardly use any animal fat anymore in meals, I make it a point of pride to buy 'organic' food, even if I have to spend time to search for it far from home, and even though it costs much more than the other kind, and I force my son to follow a Mediterranean diet. I go to the gym regularly and I insist that my son must also be involved in sports (of course I can do all of this because I have the time, and above all, adequate economic and cultural resources).

But this is not the end of it – a closer look reveals that the entirety of my daily life is marked by some kind of prevention. Often this happens unconsciously, routinely, but that doesn't make it any less restrictive. For example, when I think about it, I realize that I avoid certain places, certain hours and certain people in the city, and surely more than a man would in my situation.

Once, my partner ended up at the train station at two o'clock in the morning. There were no taxis, not to mention buses, so he calmly made his way home on foot. I would not have done that and I have often asked myself whether many women would have done so. I don't have daughters, but my friends that have admitted that they try to limit their freedom of movement more than they do with their sons, although even the latter are subjected to many more restrictions than we were when we were young.

Friendly encounters, and especially amorous ones, are subject to suspicion and mistrust. Sexuality, which for a brief period in the 1960s and 1970s was hailed as a form of liberty and creative expression, is now recast as a source of illness and contagion, if not abuse and violence. Encounters and sexuality, therefore, must be approached with caution, prudence and by putting a whole routine of prevention in motion against any possible harm they might cause.

If I lift my gaze when walking down the street or entering a bank or a shopping centre, I'm caught on closed-circuit televisions that monitor my movements, and in order for me to feel more secure they show that I'm in a supervised location where robbery, theft, molestation and other acts will be prevented or at least recorded. Access to many other zones in the city is controlled electronically this way, and for the same reason.

One could continue with many more examples. It is significant that two books that were written some time ago, one British and one American, are both entitled *The Culture of Fear*, thus presenting it as a given that our present condition is shaped by uncertainty and insecurity.

At the same time, we are encouraged to take risks, and to be ready for continual change, insecurity and flexibility. Many say that the past and the future tend to get gobbled up by a present that consists of unrelated and disconnected moments; a present that is not concerned with the future and purposefully ignores the past.

Connected with all of the above is the issue of a pressure towards individualization, a pressure that leaves us isolated, that thwarts the power of social connections, that puts forward biographical solutions to systemic problems and contradictions: an individualization that makes all of us individually responsible for anything that happens.

The horizon of certainty and stability has disintegrated in connection with what has come to be known as 'solid modernity' (to use an expression of Bauman's (2000). Marx noted earlier that his period was a time in which 'everything that is solid disappears into thin air') – or first modernity or modernity *tout court*, in contrast with postmodernity.[1] This disintegration is tied to the erosion of the state's power as the protector and source of generalized trust within a given territory. This produces an (illusory) new freedom for the individual – everything is in our hands – and, at the same time, a sense of being powerless to change the actual state of things. Indeed, change is tied to a project, or at least to a pull towards the future. Change is made possible by the recognition and analysis of the past and by the possibility for collective action based precisely on this project and recognition – all things that seem rather difficult, if not impossible, today.

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1   Different ways of naming the period in which we live are, of course, not interchangeable. Each points to a different way of interpreting society, more or less in continuity with the past, and each uses different criteria and elements. The only thing they have in common is the sense of experiencing something that is at least partially new. I don't favor one over the other; indeed I wouldn't know how to say today which one is more appropriate. I use them synonymously, precisely to indicate what is new about what we confront.

We can interpret the imperative for private and individual prevention as a way to confront the anxiety and anguish associated with instability, loneliness, uncertainty, insecurity and widespread fears. It's a self-defeating imperative because, as we know, biographical solutions to systemic contradictions do not exist. In short, it's a labor of Sisyphus, which in and of itself contributes to perpetually reproducing the very conditions that create uncertainty and fear – in addition to making us feel guilty all the time and generating mistrust in our dealings with others.

But there are contradictions, at least apparently, between the widespread imperative for private prevention and other characteristics almost solely identified with our times. I will cite two: in the first place, prevention appears to be in contradiction to the demand that we take risks; secondly, prevention seems to signal a return to the horizon of foreseeable and controllable events, which many commentators conversely observe is disappearing with the disappearance of 'solid' modernity.

Furthermore, although it is true that the imperative for prevention is widely prevalent today, and, as I have said, has been privatized and individualized in accordance with changes attributed to our 'liquid modernity', there is, however, another level at which this plays out. Beyond modalities of self-control and self-surveillance, the imperative for prevention involves systematic and systematized control; a far cry perhaps from the Panoptic[2] model of solid modernity, but just as pervasive. This is the feature that orients, influences, sets the framework for and disciplines our everyday life – just as much if not more than ever before. However, it is less a form of thought-control than control over behaviour. Its reach encompasses entire populations, while notably targeting specific individuals. It's that all-present type of 'preventive' control that spreads through the use of electronic technology: credit cards, bank cards, electronics, closed-circuit TV cameras, computers, databases, and so on, right up to Big Brother satellites that are capable of recording what we do and say in our daily activities. The emphasis here is on controlling the future, predicting and directing it. The present is of interest only insofar as it provides data to prevent what would probably happen, based on simulations and statistical calculations.

The invasion of privacy has been a valid concern for some time already due to the development of electronic technologies for surveillance and control – or technology that is mainly used for that purpose. Indeed, as a result of this technology, the distinction between public and private spaces disappears. One of

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2   I am referring here to Foucault's famous work on discipline as the heart of modernity; pervasive and widespread control, as well as self-control, are how the modern subject came into existence. The Panopticon, notoriously, is the structure designed by Jeremy Bentham, consisting of a circular tower in which an invisible guard can see yet not be seen by those he must control.

the characteristics of these methods of control is that they are even more invisible than the guard in the tall tower of the old Panopticon. These methods get mixed up with freedom because we are the ones who willingly use them. They do not lead back to a single, identifiable source of command (the state, for example). Instead, they are impersonal. They do not purvey ethical or even juridical values or norms. Control is achieved through an almost invisible modality of inclusion/ exclusion. But perhaps the most important characteristic today is that they exert control and discipline beyond the territorial borders of a single state. Indeed, they are extraterritorial by definition, built for the cosmopolitan nomads that we have become, whether we wanted to or not.

Then there are those methods of more or less permanent repression and exclusion with which the process of economic globalization controls individuals and populations deemed 'expendable' (Bauman 2004) – refugee camps, temporary detention centres, etc., all of which fall outside the rule of law. And then there are the new procedures for border control, which were put in place to turn away the masses seeking a better way of life. The newest methods were first tailored for use in the United States to monitor 'presumed' terrorists. And, of course, there's the 'preventive war', which like a 'therapy' for a terminal disease – for example, interventions to excise cancers that wind up spreading – kills more healthy 'cells' than anything else.

The various ways of labelling present-day reality – the society of risk, information, surveillance, uncertainty – not only lead to various dystopian views, but also occasionally appear to be in conflict with each other even while the same themes are continually reappraised and shifted from one description to another. For example, the hypertrophy of the present appears to be negated by those who view the present as a prevailing attempt to influence the future (through information and surveillance). Also, how does one reconcile the process of individualization and privatization with a type of knowledge and administration based on probabilities, categories and actuarial tables?

Another important distinction must be put in evidence: the difference between descriptions that emphasize the presence of a tendency towards deresponsibilization (the disappearance of the real subject in its entirety and, above all, the disappearance of her life story, social identity and voice) on the one hand, and descriptions that instead emphasize a return to moral judgements to gain access to certain goods and services. The blaming of those that do not adopt certain precautions, as well as, in general, the emphasis on victimization, are an example of this, as we shall see. Are these differences incompatible with each other or is there a relationship and interrelationship between the various descriptions?

The question of how social control works today strikes me as particularly interesting. Some students talk about the worldwide extension of the Panopticon

through expert systems of classification and categorization. Others put the emphasis on the fluid and factual, rather than the normative character of today's institutions. But those who speak of the extensive, global spread of a Panopticon forget an important aspect of the disciplinary function of the Panopticon itself: the internalization of control, the acting of domination through the 'minds' and 'consciousness' of those controlled, whereas the contemporary 'panopticon' works through systems that mainly target behaviours. Yet, anyone that denies that it's possible to speak of a Panopticon today has to come to terms not only with the use of sophisticated systems of classification and selection, but also with the internalization of attitudes and motivations for consumption, which many define as the ideology of contemporary capitalism, not to mention the imperative of independence, i.e., to be 'self-made', to take your life into your own hands and take responsibility for anything and everything that happens. This imperative has important moral implications, yet also seems to be in conflict with what others view as the dominant utilitarian ethic today.

Also, with regard to social control, what can we say about what has been called a new 'great internment', i.e., the growth of populations living under restrictive measures that limit their personal freedoms, whether they be, as I said, administrative measures (temporary detention centres) or judicial ones (prisons that long ago shed any pretence at rehabilitating inmates)?

One aspect that seems to be common to nearly every description available in the sociological marketplace today is the emphasis on the disappearance of not just 'society', an entity that probably eroded along with the nation state that gave birth to it, but of the social dimension itself as the concrete and symbolic fabric of relationships where individuals interact and by which they are motivated. Along with the social dimension, the past has also necessarily disappeared as a significant feature of life. The disagreements between the authors of different scenarios concern the dominance of the future over the present and vice versa, while there appears to be implicit agreement about the suppression and insignificance of the past in present times. The past, however, also means a relationship between cause and effect. The social causes that created the present are precisely what have disappeared from the scene. The type of prevention practiced today does not take 'causes' into account, and perhaps this is the biggest difference from the prevention of the past.

These are the things I want to talk about, and I maintain that using prevention as a lens may serve to clarify connections and differences since I think that prevention is directly implied by 'risk', 'information', and 'surveillance' and may be used to show how our everyday life is decided or 'channelled' by both our own individual efforts and by impersonal systems, both interacting in the name of 'prevention'.

In short, I would like to render explicit what appears implicit in many reflections on modernity today. A society of risk, a society of surveillance, a society of uncertainty, and cultures of fear imply both individualized modalities of action, and impersonal, collective modalities that are systematically geared for prevention. All these definitions simultaneously imply internalizing the moral imperative for self-sufficiency and independence and widely expanding plans for control of behaviours (rather than motivations). They imply policies that in the name of prevention favour seemingly 'soft' measures of control, as well as policies that are geared toward excluding, incapacitating, and neutralizing, still in the name of prevention.

However, this also requires questioning the things that are most commonly said about contemporaneity: that it has an unforeseeable and uncontrollable essence, that it is hypertrophic, that there is a widespread perception of powerlessness.

It also requires a gendered reading of this contemporaneity. Indeed it seems to me that while all of us are involved in 'preventing', the imperative of prevention is predominantly female gendered. This is both because it is traditionally women who take on the tasks of caring and concern themselves with prevention for the rest of the family, and because prevention is especially aimed at them. Men, on the other hand, are urged to take risks. And lastly, although this imperative puts every man and woman in the position of being a potential victim, this is a position and condition traditionally associated with the female sex.

Indeed, as I will try to show, women, and 'femaleness' more generally, also play a role of prime importance in the images of and justifications for contemporary wars, especially the so-called 'preventive' war.

The core of this work remains the question of social control. This is the key to reading other themes, as well as the main topic for our attention. Prevention appears to be at the centre of social control methods today. That is why I will give particular emphasis to those urban safety policies that have drawn a lot of attention in recent years, whether they are being planned or have already been put into action by local governments in the name of the citizens' right to be safe from the danger of becoming victims of common crime.[3]

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3   This work is part of the Prin 2003 research project on *Analisi e valutazione delle politiche di sicurezza locale [Analysis and evaluation of local security policies]*. The empirical data I collected on local security as a problem of governance, which was co-financed by the University of Perugia, will be set forth in another volume. The contents presented here are more general reflections, which constitute the background.

Chapter 1

From One Modernity to the Next

Prevention and Progress

It should first be noted that prevention, by and large, is a good thing. If I dwell here to consider its, so to speak, dark sides, and the more or less unexpected consequences of its rhetorics and practices, that does not mean that prevention in and of itself is harmful. On the contrary, preventing events that would be harmful to oneself and the collectivity can only be considered useful and necessary. Moreover, this has in one form or another always been practised by human beings.

Today, however, we are witnessing two related phenomena: an intensification of the imperative of prevention, as well as its individualization and privatization. The origins and consequences of these two phenomena deserve examination because they shed light on our social life and its cultural and symbolic aspects, especially with regard to current modalities for social control.

There is nothing new about prevention, at least not on the surface. It became a slogan that spread with the first, so-called 'solid' modernity. Life expectancy growth in the wealthy Western world is certainly due to this. The rate of infant mortality and death in childbirth, for instance, was reduced from the time doctors began to wash their hands before operating. Not to mention vaccinations, which were adopted for mass use for soldiers during the First World War.

Prevention refers to an entire series of individual and social attitudes and practices that aim to reduce the probability that certain harmful events will occur. From this point of view, and from the point of view of controlling the present so that certain things don't happen in the future, prevention has always been practised in one form or another. Rites and myths of ancient societies and of so-called primitive societies provide abundant examples. It is no accident that Mary Douglas's research on the concept of pollution in 'traditional' societies led to her famous studies (Douglas 1966, 1985, 1992) on risk in contemporary society, which demonstrate that the denaturalization of events has a long history, perhaps as long as the existence of humanity. Attempts by humankind to prevent unwanted events are just as ancient. In Italy, the famous works by De Martino (1948, 1959) on the peasantry in the south during the 1940s and 1950s point to the rites that protected them from the extreme danger of losing their 'presence'.

What changed with (first) modernity are the instruments employed for these efforts and their corresponding ideology. Science played a central and key role here. It was necessary to have knowledge, in the scientific and positivist sense of the term, in order to control and prevent. Planning for the future was an integral part of the myth of progress. Projecting future society became a job of institutions, and of the state.

Even everyday life was directly involved, with the proliferation of the knowledge that invested it and aimed at changing it in order for it to acquire rationality, so that it was directed towards predetermined goals. The use of statistics to calculate not only the incidence of certain phenomena, but the probability that they will occur, became a common practice and extended to ever larger areas of social life.

The issues of hygiene and crime are perhaps the best examples of this. The discovery that bacteria can cause health problems led not only to the medical profession developing a cure, but also to the practice of cleanliness in the profession and the environment. Women played the leading role in this. The separation between public and private realms was supported by science with the rise of 'experts' for whom women became 'special clients or guinea pigs (Ehrenreich and English 1978). If middle-class women at the beginning of the nineteenth century suffered from the 'illness of emptiness' and were later diagnosed as hysterics, by entering into an alliance with experts they found a new role in domestic work. Domestic work became a full-time profession. The germ theory of disease necessitated cleanliness; the economy imposed the need for domestic efficiency.

It was in the second half of the nineteenth century that the work of middle-class women's organizations included reaching out to working-class and proletarian women to teach them how to clean their own homes and to take care of their own families' health. In a certain sense, prevention of illness in the course of everyday life became one of the instruments for the transmission and hegemony of bourgeois culture, and one of its key points was precisely the role of women, as wives and mothers, in taking care of the family and the proper reproduction of family members. The advice of experts and publicity about personal hygiene and homecare products played an important role at this time. This is how the role of wife and mother became, really and truly, a full-time job.

Indeed, the separation between internal and external realms, and taking care of the internal one – the home, the job of selecting, cleaning and so on – reflected, confirmed and reproduced the necessity for order and discipline in the outside world. The extent to which the question of order was involved in the rhetoric and acts of prevention will be clarified as we move on. (For a brilliant analysis of the relationship between oneself and the home, see Pasquinelli 2004.) Order, discipline, and the need for security acquired, as Foucault noted (1975), new form and substance with the emergence of modernity.

But prevention in everyday life – prevention by those with responsibility for housework – was certainly not limited to hygiene. Their primary responsibility was to see to their children's education, and this task was also what middle-class women taught and proselytized so that children found their way, became good workers and citizens that obeyed the law. Furthermore, women were to be good wives, to keep their husbands in line, to keep them from drinking too much, to see that they didn't go around making trouble. In short, it was women's work to see that men were ready and able and in good shape to report to work. Even today, women are generally blamed for men and children that turn out badly.

Beyond the good offices of wives and mothers, the prevention of common crime – of street crime – expressly became a task that the new criminology entrusted to research into the scientific causes of criminality itself. Since its birth as a scientific discipline, criminology adopted a positivist posture and never abandoned it until very recently. Yet it was the Italian positivist school more than any other that focused on prevention. Elaborating the concept of social dangerousness was crucial to the rise of the positivist school. Ferri (1979) was not only the first to conceive of punishment as a means of social defence, he also introduced the question of prevention to be achieved through reforms and social interventions, which were to take the various causes of crime into account in order to prevent crimes from happening.

The rise of fascism initially thwarted the widespread adoption of this approach in Italy. But it was picked up again and reformulated as a component of most of the studies on criminology and the literature on social control and deviance, on both sides of the Atlantic. The high point for this school of thought was the period when the welfare state was established and expanded.

On another level, Cesare Beccaria (2003) teaches that prevention is, of course, also an aim of the modern penal code insofar as the threat of punishment should serve to discourage criminal acts.

Urban planning too was very early on geared towards preventing disorder and the development of dangerous crowds. The grand boulevards in Paris supplanted back alleys, and Paris became the city of light partly in response to the Paris Commune of 1848. It is well known how much urban architecture implicitly or explicitly owes to the imperative of the prevention of disorder, crime, incivility and upheavals.

In short, prevention was an imperative and a central practice of modernity; it was then that social and other sciences emerged in order to understand the present for the purpose of controlling the future. All of this expert knowledge employed an etiological hypothesis. Once discovered the root causes of phenomena and what produced them in the past, it would be possible to prevent or control them in